
MAJOR TRAUMA NETWORKS – THAMES VALLEY AND WESSEX

RETURN TO WORK AFTER MAJOR TRAUMA: PATIENT / FAMILY INFORMATION LEAFLET

If you or a family member have had a recent injury (such as an amputation, burns, head injury, orthopaedic injury or spinal cord injury), then this leaflet provides basic information and sources of advice about return to work or other occupation after an injury. The circumstances of your return to work will vary with the nature of your injuries and your particular occupation – you may, for example be in work, education, ‘job seeking’, a home-maker or a carer.

1. Off-sick / Fit Note

If you are employed you must give your employer a ‘fit note’ if you are off sick for more than 7 days in a row (including non-working days). This will say whether you are considered ‘fit for work’ and may also give details of any relevant restrictions, so that your employer can consider how you can be supported as and when you return to work.

For guidance on the Fit Note see: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/fit-note>

In order to fill in the Fit Note your hospital doctor, rehabilitation consultant, therapist or GP may ask about the nature of your work as this may influence any advice about when you return to work and how best to support you in doing so. **It is suggested that you ask for a copy of any written opinion on your return to work.**

If you or your injured family member is self-employed or unemployed, you may require a Fit Note to support a claim for health-related benefits. If you or your family member is at school, college or university, you will need to contact the course and follow their sickness absence reporting procedure.

2. Contact with your employers

It is essential that your employer is informed that you are off sick at the earliest opportunity. You will need to provide them with Fit Notes and keep them informed of progress, in line with their sickness absence policy.

3. Sources of information and advice

If you have any concerns about the process of being “signed off sick”, sick pay, benefit entitlements or return to work, then you may find the following **Government advice** to be helpful:

- a. *Taking sick leave:* <https://www.gov.uk/taking-sick-leave>
- b. *The Fit Note:* <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/fit-note>
- c. *Statutory sick pay:* <https://www.gov.uk/statutory-sick-pay>
- d. *Benefits:* <https://www.gov.uk/if-you-become-disabled>

You can also obtain independent advice from the **Citizens Advice** on line at:

- a. *Sickness absence:*
http://www.adviceguide.org.uk/england/work_e/work_time_off_work_e/off_work_because_of_sickness.htm

b. Benefit entitlement:

http://www.adviceguide.org.uk/england/benefits_e/benefits_sick_or_disabled_people_and_carers_ew/benefits_for_people_who_are_sick_or_disabled.htm

c. Self-employment:

http://www.adviceguide.org.uk/england/work_e/work_self-employed_or_looking_for_work_e/self-employment_checklist.htm

OR you can make an appointment to attend a Citizen's Advice Centre.

4. Work restrictions / adjustments

Assuming that you are able to return to work, it is important for your employer to know in advance about any restrictions and adjustments that may be needed (e.g. changes to hours/duties, additional training, equipment or help with travel). Many employers have a set policy on return to work (e.g. graded return) after illness or injury which may start with a return to work interview.

If your employer requires more detailed advice than is provided by the Fit Note, a health professional (e.g. hospital doctor, rehabilitation consultant, therapist or GP) may be able to provide this. **Again, it is suggested that you ask to have a copy of any such written advice to your employer.**

Sources of advice on suggested work adjustments include the following:

- Access to Work support: <https://www.gov.uk/access-to-work/overview>
- Equality & Human Rights: <http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/private-and-public-sector-guidance/employing-people/work-place-adjustments>
- Job Accommodation Network: <https://askjan.org>

5. Specialist advice on return to work or other occupation, if required

If there is doubt about your ability to return to work or related risks, specialist advice may be needed. If so, it may be helpful to consult the Occupational Health Service, a Disability Employment Advisor at your local Jobcentre or a vocational rehabilitation service that supports people in return to work.

If a return to work is not anticipated in the near future, it may be helpful for you to undertake 'work-related activities' (e.g. voluntary work, adult education) to re-establish daily routine and build up your skills, stamina and confidence. For some people recovery takes a long time and prospects of a return to work or other occupation may not be clear for many months. However, discussing your options with a health professional may still be helpful.

6. Benefit decisions

It is vital that decisions about benefit entitlement are based on accurate and current information. As such, a report written specifically to support a benefit claim from a relevant health professional may be essential, particularly if your restrictions are subtle or complex and not readily apparent to others. It is important not to assume that a named health professional will be contacted automatically. It may be advisable to contact this health professional yourself.

Advice on benefits entitlements and applications include the following:

Government advice: <https://www.gov.uk/if-you-become-disabled>

Independent advice:

http://www.adviceguide.org.uk/england/benefits_e/benefits_sick_or_disabled_people_and_carers_ew/benefits_for_people_who_are_sick_or_disabled.htm

7. Fit for Work website

A valuable source of advice about the above issues can be found on a single website as part of the Fit for Work initiative: <http://fitforwork.org/>

If you have concerns about how best to return to work after injury it is suggested that you seek advice from your GP or other relevant health professional (such as a rehabilitation consultant or therapist).

We wish you the very best in recovering from your injury.

This leaflet was prepared by staff of the Working out Programme, Community Head Injury Service, Buckinghamshire Healthcare NHS Trust, on behalf of the Thames Valley and Wessex Trauma Networks as part of a Return to Work after Major Trauma Project. We are grateful to members of the Patient Liaison Group, British Orthopaedic Association, for their feedback comments.